



## **Envision Arlington Governance Task Group DRAFT**

Date: Wednesday, October 2, 2019  
Time: 7:00pm  
Location: Lyons Hearing Room, Town Hall, 730 Mass Ave

### **Minutes**

Attendance: *Juli Brazile, Kelly Lynema, Len Diggins, Steve Revilak, Wendy VanderHart, Kezia Simister, Ken Garden, Catharine Farrell, Patrick Hanlon, Christa Kelleher, Adam Badik, Ky Bertoli, Christina Bertoli, Roderick Holland, Betty Stone, Bill Berkowitz, Elizabeth Dray, Charlotte Milan, Danuta Forbes, Mustafa Varoglu, Lisa Bielefeld, Bruice Moulton, DeAnne Dupont, Zachary Grunko, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Frank Ciano, Greg Christiana, Tom Ehbrecht, Carolyn Parsons, Michael Watson, Melanie Brown, Peter Fuller, John May, Susan Doctrow.*

#### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Juli Brazile discussed the Envision Arlington Governance Task Group, its mission, and how task group meetings function. She noted that the Governance Task Group is typically responsible for precinct meetings, Town Meeting Member orientation, and in recent years has worked to identify the best way to collect and share Town meeting Member candidate statements in advance of local elections.

Juli also presented the results from the 2019 annual town survey, where 72% of respondents indicated they were interested in attending precinct meetings, up from 61% in 2016. The top reported reason for interest in precinct meetings was to discuss the issues on the warrant for Town Meeting.

Attendees shared their names, precinct number, and whether they are currently a Town Meeting Member.

#### **2. Precinct meetings: what has worked in the past, what should be addressed going forward?**

Len Diggins began the discussion by sharing his experience in Arlington as a renter, Town Meeting Member, and participant in the Governance Task Group. He said he wants to help Town Meeting Members make

better connections with residents in their precinct and work together to make the changes they want to see in town. In particular, Len stated his two primary interests:

- Regular precinct meetings, ideally fall and spring, on an annual basis
- Establishing the Governance Task Group as a key supporter of Town Meeting Members, providing information, meeting guidance, and logistical support

Juli then invited attendees to share their experiences with and ideas for precinct meetings; comments listed below:

- Have held but struggled with poor attendance at precinct meetings in the past.
- Precinct 7: had two experiences with this, one after hours at Fox Library regarding the debt exclusion and override, and one at a meeting called by the ARB regarding density. Noted that Town Meeting Members are sometimes not the only ones to call precinct meetings. Also noted that the way people talk about an issue at a precinct meeting might be indicative of what will happen at Town Meeting.
- Precinct 8/10: Have had attendance of 30-50 people. We postered the neighborhood and went door to door to invite residents. Asked where the drive for precinct meetings should come from: Town Meeting Members, Envision Arlington? Would like a model for how to run a precinct meeting.
- Precinct 18: Meets at Dallin School. Would like guidance on how to handle out of town guests, or how to best facilitate a precinct meeting.
- Greg Christiana spoke about his experience setting up precinct meetings in April 2019. Most Town Meeting Members were receptive to help with logistics, but there was some pushback from those who were worried that precinct meetings were a mechanism for the town to push a particular agenda. There was one precinct where he didn't hear back from single Town Meeting Member.
- Precinct meetings are different than Town Meeting – there aren't specific rules of order, so can we help support or train facilitators so meetings run well?
- Precinct 6/7: In our last precinct meeting, most of the residents were there to learn about the issues, but the meeting was dominated by people who were not from our precincts
- The timing of the Select Board report is a challenge
- What is the scope of the Election Modernization Committee?

**3. Fall meetings: what should be the purpose and agenda for fall precinct meetings?**

- Educate people about what a warrant article actually is
  - o Communicate that the warrant is essentially an agenda and that over the next few months it will be developed for Town Meeting
  - o Provide education on how to get an article on the warrant
- Give a primer on how town government works
  - o One attendee noted that it may be challenging to get people to attend a meeting that is essentially a civics lesson
  - o Provide information on when and how residents can stay informed and influence what is being developed outside of fall and spring precinct meetings - annual calendar of sorts
  - o Give residents a look back on what happened at Town Meeting in April and what has happened since
- Would like this to be framed as an opportunity for residents to get to know their Town Meeting Members and other neighbors
  - o Social event on how Arlington is run, town government, what different departments do
- Discuss which Town Meeting Members aren't running again, identifying new candidates and encouraging people to pull papers to run for Town Meeting Member in the spring
  - o Another attendee echoed the importance of recruiting potential Town Meeting Members to run
- Allocate open time in precinct meetings for attendees to discuss what people want to see in their precincts

#### **4. Promotion: how can we best promote precinct meetings and encourage greater attendance?**

- Door to door
- Flyers (libraries, utility poles, bus stops)
- School newsletters
- Posters / yard signs
- Use Town Day 2020 to publicize
- Library table In September
- Town Hall Displays
- Feast of the East
- Apps, websites, Facebook/social media, YourArlington.com
- Promote at state and local elections
- Develop a Town Notice sublist for precincts
- Encourage people to attend at the fall "civics" precinct meetings simply to meet their neighbors and share in a discussion, even if they don't have a particularly issue they want to talk about – creating community
- Town should use promotion of going digital with all documents as a way to promote resident engagement
- Cross promote with the Arlington League of Women Voters
- Advertise in different languages

**5. Needs: What materials should be created to support Town Meeting Members as they plan and implement precinct meetings?**

- Training or orientation on how to fairly facilitate precinct meetings
- Playbook for how meetings should go<sup>1</sup>
- Summaries of the articles on the warrant
- FAQ on how to do a 10-person warrant article
- Guide to why precinct representation matters
- Meeting agreements or rules for participant engagement<sup>2</sup>
- Document laying out the governance process month by month
- ACMi 2 – 3 minute engaging introduction to Town Meeting
- Primer for Town meeting Members on the mechanisms of Town Meeting
- Offer food at meetings: consider Food Link or allowing bake sales

**6. Venues: In addition to Town Hall, the libraries, and Arlington schools, where should precinct meetings be held?**

- Juli brought up that Envision Arlington does not have the budget to fund venue rental for every precinct meeting; the Governance Task Group tries to book school locations on nights when other meetings are being held to save on costs, but this isn't always possible.
- Local businesses
- Restaurants
- Faith communities/churches<sup>3</sup>
- Community room at the Arlington Police Department<sup>4</sup>
  - o Dallin Museum
  - o Banks
  - o Law firms
  - o Meeting locations should be in the precinct whose Town Meeting Members are holding the meeting
  - o Challenge to predict how many people will attend
  - o Tag precinct meetings on to community education events at Arlington High School
  - o Real estate offices
  - o Capital and Regent Theaters
  - o Central location with breakout rooms, although it was noted that getting attendance by anyone other than Town Meeting Members at this kind of event is challenging
  - o One participant suggested that getting funding for venue rental for regular precinct meetings should be a warrant article next spring

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<sup>1</sup> See attached PDF, “Top Ten Things to Do When Hosting an Event”, as a potential starting point

<sup>2</sup> See attached PDF, “NH Listens Group Agreements”, as a potential starting point

<sup>3</sup> Some participants noted that some residents may not feel comfortable attending a meeting in these locations

<sup>4</sup> Some participants noted that some residents may not feel comfortable attending a meeting in this location

- Tie locations in with municipal vulnerability preparedness planning

## **7. Miscellaneous Discussions**

- Email addresses for Town Meeting Members
- Special Town Meeting: should there be one large precinct meeting in advance of any Special Town Meeting?

## **8. Next Steps**

- Town Meeting Members in attendance should email Juli with potential dates/times for fall precinct meetings (ideally the first week of November)
- Precincts should consider appointing a point person from each precinct to take the lead on coordinating with the Governance Task Group.
- Individuals interested in developing educational materials for precinct meetings should follow up with Juli.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.

# NH Listens Group Agreements

- Share air time so everyone gets a chance to be heard.
- Be respectful and use respectful language.
- If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point.
- It's okay to disagree, but don't personalize it. Focus on the idea, not the person.
- Speak up if the process doesn't seem fair.
- Personal stories stay in the group unless we all agree we can share them.
- If you talk about people who are not here, don't use their names.
- Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."
- It's okay to put issues like race and class on the table.
- We all share responsibility for making the group productive.
- Listen to each other.



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# Top Ten Things to Do When Hosting an Event

- #1 Always greet people when they arrive.
- #2 Take time for meaningful introductions.
- #3 Point out bathrooms and all logistics that help make folks comfortable.
- #4 Always review group agreements.
- #5 Let participants know they are part of something bigger; be clear about how their voices will make a difference.
- #6 Support your facilitators—it is hard work to remain attentive and fair minded. A moderator should be available to check in with small groups.
- #7 Always prepare for differences that make a difference (political, racial, social class, education, etc.). All voices are equal.
- #8 Be prepared for direct questions and assume transparency is the best approach when answering questions about your project.
- #9 Ask participants to complete an evaluation, and always debrief with facilitators and the planning group.
- #10 Have fun and maintain a sense of humor!



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